

THE ANALYSIS OF ORGANIC RICE CONTRACT FARMING IN CAMBODIA: A LESSON LEARNED FOR INDONESIA

Betti Rosita Sari

Research Center for Regional Resources, Indonesia Institute of Sciences
Widya Grha Build. 3th Floor, Jl. Gatot Subroto Kav. 10, South Jakarta, Indonesia, 12710
email: betty_rositasari@yahoo.com, betti.rosita.sari@lipi.go.id

ABSTRACT

This study examines organic rice contract farming in Cambodia and its impact on farmers' livelihood. The study's objective is to gain a better insight of the terms and conditions of rice contract farming scheme in Cambodia, and determine under what conditions contract farming could bring improvements to farmers' livelihoods. This study contributes new research findings on contract farming practices and farmers' livelihood due to organic-rice contract farming with a case study in Kampong Speu province, Cambodia.

Rice contract farming is not widespread in Cambodia at present, but is expected to expand significantly in the near future. Contract farming can increase investment into agricultural and infrastructure in rural areas. Contract farming can also enable farmers to access credit, inputs, technical advice and information about market condition and pricing trends. Yet, the disadvantages of contract farming include loss of farmer bargaining power and a potential reduction in profit margins, increased emphasis on improving production quality, land consolidation in favor of participating contract farmers, and less secure livelihoods.

In this study, the contract farming arrangements of Angkor Kasekam Rongroeung (AKR) Company is studied. A survey of 16 contract farmers and 20 non-contract farmers in Kampong Speu province has been undertaken to examine the AKR contract farming scheme arrangements and to identify farmer's motivations to participate in contract farming and its impact on farmers' livelihood.

AKR rice contract farming improves farmers' livelihood because they get a higher income and rice yields. Higher price, good rice seed, and access to market are the main reasons for farmers to participate in AKR contract farming. However, strict requirements, heavy penalties, poor extension services, and lack of information about the contract terms and conditions reduce farmers' long-term participation in contract farming. In addition, contract farmers have less bargaining power to negotiate with the company due to the absence of a farmer association.

Overall, the status of contract farming in Cambodia clearly points to the great potential for its expansion in the future. However, for this to be realized and for the benefits to be shared fairly between companies and the farmers themselves, the study concludes that issues about the role of the government, the regulatory framework, contract enforcement, and the formation of small-scale farmer organizations must all be addressed.

Keywords: Cambodia, organic rice, contract farming

INTRODUCTION

Cambodia covers an area of 181.035 km², with a population estimated at 14 million in 2008 who majority depend primarily on agriculture (largely rice) and livestock for their livelihoods. Agriculture in Cambodia is both the main source of revenue and the single largest employment sector; agriculture represents 30.1% of Gross Domestic Product and employs 79.7 percent of Cambodia's total population

in 2006 (Sophal, 2009). Table 1 summarizes the importance of agriculture in Cambodia, such as the growth of value added to GDP, employment and land area since 2000 to 2006.

From the table above, agriculture value added is declining from 35.9 percent in 2000 to 30.1 percent in 2006. Agricultural production and general rural economic growth remain far below their potential because of low productivity, high vulnerability to

Table-1. Agriculture in Cambodia 2000-2006

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Agriculture, value added (% of GDP)	35.9	34.4	31.2	32.0	29.5	30.8	30.1
Agriculture, value added (annual % growth)	-0.4	3.6	-2.5	10.5	-0.9	15.7	5.5
Agricultural land (% of land area)	27.0	27.7	28.3	28.9	29.6	30.3	27.0
Employment in agriculture (% of total employment)	73.7	70.2
Rural population (% of total population)	83.1	82.5	82.0	81.4	80.9	80.3	79.7

Source: World Development Indicators Online. Available from http://publications.worldbank.org/ecommerce/catalog/product?item_id=

weather, constrained access to land, forests, fisheries and markets, and lack of adequate infrastructure (such as roads, water supply, electricity and communications networks). In addition, the majorities of farm producers in Cambodia do not have officially documented land titles, and therefore have diminished capacity to secure affordable lines of credit for either crop production or land improvements (irrigation). Generally small farmers cannot access credit from formal sector (commercial banks and microfinance institutions) because they do not have collateral, such as land certificate and feel insecure to take loan. They usually borrow money from money lenders with high interest rate¹ and being indebted if the crop failed. The severe shortage of agricultural credit in Cambodia is reduce farmers' capacity to continue to increase productivity and output, due to their inability to adequately finance purchases of improved higher-yielding seed, fertilizer, pesticides, farm machinery, and grain storage equipment (Shean, 2010).

Since the majority of the population depends on agriculture for their livelihood and most of this population is made of smallholders with less than 2 ha per household, the low productivity of agriculture implies that poverty is widespread in the country. Based on Agrifood Consulting International (ACI) in 2006, around 28 percent of the population are poor and concentrated in rural areas (34 percent of the rural population are poor).

Regarding this issue, the Royal Government of Cambodia has indicated in its Rectangular Strategy Phase II 2004-2008 that its agriculture policy is "to

¹ Based on interview with villagers, the interest rate of MFI in Cambodia is 30 percent/ month and interest rate from money lenders may higher than MFIs. Farmers usually borrow money from MFI to buy plough machine or expand their business.

improve agricultural productivity and diversification, thereby enabling the agriculture sector to serve as the dynamic driving force for economic growth and poverty reduction" (Agrifood and CamConsult, 2006). To develop its agricultural sector, the Cambodian government is promoting contract farming, seeking Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) and promoting agricultural exports. Dealing with this effort, the government of Cambodia issued Draft of Contract Farming sub-decree to attract more investment in agricultural sector and improve farmers' livelihood in rural areas. According to MAFF, contract farming can be useful to fill the gap on agricultural challenges in Cambodia since contract farming provide input to farmers, such as seed and fertilizer, open access to market and credit, provide extension service and technical and knowledge transfer for farmers.

The most visible driver of recent land concessions and agricultural investment globally, including contract farming in Cambodia was the 2008 food crisis (Grain, 2008). The main causes of the food crisis in 2008 were increased pressures on natural resources, water scarcity, export restrictions imposed by major producers when food prices were high, and high demand for bio-fuel. Countries that depend heavily on food imports for their food security are now searching the world for cheap overseas farmland to grow food and then export it home. Governments from the Gulf States, including Kuwait and Qatar, as well as South Korea, Japan and China, for example, are looking to stabilize their food supplies by acquiring foreign land for food production in the hopes of averting domestic social unrest and political instability over food price and supply. These investments are targeted towards developing countries where production costs are much lower and where land and water are more abundant. Other factors that

influence these investments include geographic proximity and climatic conditions for preferred staple crops.

Cambodia has become a major target of this global agricultural investment trend. Cambodia has land deals under negotiation with several countries, worth as much as US\$3 billion in agriculture-related foreign investment and apparently involving millions of hectares of land (Grain, 2008). The largest reported potential deal so far in Cambodia is a bilateral deal with Kuwait involving a US\$546 million loan in exchange for a 70-90 year lease covering a "large area" of rice lands in Kampong Thom province, where Kuwait will organize production for exporting rice back to Kuwait. The size of the land concession has been estimated at somewhere between 50,000 and 130,000 hectares (Goodman, 2009). Qatar has also been expressing its interest in similar deals.

Most of these deals, however, are still at the negotiation stages and provisionally appear to involve leasing rather than outright purchasing of agricultural lands, where Gulf state companies will pay rent for the land, provide inputs, and contractually agree to buy the products. However, it remains unclear if the Gulf state investment form would be purchased at a fixed future rate or prevailing market prices, and what percentage would be paid to local farmers who actually work the lands (Asia Times, 2008).

From the description above, this paper examines an existing organic-rice contract farming system in Cambodia and the changes that it has brought to farmers' livelihood. Firstly, I review contract farming system, includes its models and its costs and benefits to farmers and companies. Secondly, I describe about contract farming practices in Cambodia at present, includes identify who joins and who doesn't, the reason behind why farmers choose to participate in contract farming and analyze the positive and negatives impacts of organic-rice contract farming system on farmers' livelihood. Finally, I conclude with some recommendation.

REVIEW OF CONTRACT FARMING SYSTEM

Contract Farming System

Based on the Draft Sub-decree on Contract Farming (2010), the Cambodian government defines

contract farming as "the implementation framework of contract based agricultural production with the intention to strengthen, take responsibilities, build trust, and fairness between producing and purchasing party ensuring prices, purchases, and supply of agricultural crops both on quantity and quality, increasing processing and exporting of agricultural crops to contribute to national economic development and poverty reduction of the people parallel to the policies and strategies of the Royal Government".

The broad definition of contract farming is a binding agreement between private companies and (groupings of) local farmers (Vermeulen and Lorenzo Cotula, 2010). Contract farming represents an agreement between farmers and contractors (mostly processing and/ or marketing firms) for the production and supply of agricultural products (Cai *et al*, 2008). Under contract farming agreements, the growers or local farmers should grow and deliver to the contracting company agricultural produce of a specified quantity and quality at an agreed date. In exchange, the company provides upfront inputs, such as credit, seeds, fertilizers, pesticides, and technical advice, all of which may be charged against the final purchase price, and agrees to buy the produce supplied at a specified of price (Eaton and Shepherd, 2001; Setboonsarng, 2008; Vermeulen and Lorenzo Cotula, 2010).

Contract Farming Models

Contract farming arrangements can be structured in a number of ways depending on the crop, the objectives and resources of the contractor, and the experience of the farmers (Eaton and Shepherd, 2001). Sriboonchitta and Wiboonpongse (2008) argue that the type of contract farming model should be dictated by the market demand, production and processing requirements, and the economic and social viability of larger-scale versus small-holder production. The contractor could be a private firm or a cooperative. Vermeulen and Lorenzo Cotula (2010; quoting Eaton and Shepherd 2001) classify contract farming schemes into five broad models:

1. Highly centralized models, where an agribusiness company buys produce from a large number of smallholders, with tight control over quality and quantity;

2. The nucleus estate model, where the agribusiness company combines contract farming (“out growers”) with direct involvement in production through a plantation estate;
3. The multipartite model, whereby farmers sign contracts with a joint-venture established between an agribusiness company and a local entity, which could be a government agency, a local company, or a corporate body representing local farmers;
4. The informal model, where more informal agreements are made on a seasonal basis, with the inputs provided by the company often restricted to only seeds and fertilizers; and
5. The intermediary model, whereby an agribusiness company may have contracts with intermediaries, who sign contracts with a larger number of farmers.

Eaton and Shepherd (2001) report that the “intermediary contract farming model” is one of the most predominant in Southeast Asia, including in Thailand and Indonesia. For example, in Thailand large food processing companies and fresh vegetable entrepreneurs purchase crops from individual “collectors” or from farmer committees that have their own informal arrangements with farmers (Oxfam, 2008). Contracts are generally signed at the time of planting on a one year basis that specify how much produce the company will buy and at what price. Some contract agreements also mention the quality standards required for the produce and the penalty when the produce does not fulfill the standard requirement.

The Cost and Benefit of Contract Farming

There are many reports documentation how

farmers have become worse off and better off through contract farming arrangements. Farmers become worse off in particular that it is an elaborate way of taking advantage of small-scale farmer, while become better off when contract farming enables smallholder farmers to gain access to credit, seeds and technologies, which can stimulate the transfer of technology and management skills (da Silva, 2005). The costs and benefits of contract farming for farmers can be concluded in the table 2 below.

From the company perspective, contract farming also brings benefits and costs since they have agreements with a large number of contract farmers. The costs and benefits of contract farming for farmers can be seen in the table 3.

CONTRACT FARMING PRACTICES IN CAMBODIA

At present, there are a limited number of examples of contract farming in Cambodia, despite its potential for dramatically increasing farmer incomes and productivity. One example of rice contract farming in Cambodia, examined by Cai, *et al* (2008), is the case of organic rice farmers contracted by the *Angkor Kasekam Roungreung* (AKR) company, which has a rice mill located in Kandal Province. Cai *et al*'s study contrasted contract farmers and non-contract farmers to determine the factors leading to the farmers' decision to sign a contract with the company. The study then assessed their performance under the contract farming agreement. Cai *et al*'s research, however, was limited to a statistical analysis of the economic performance of contract farming. It did not study the wider changes to farmers' livelihoods as a result of contract farming.

Table-2. The Costs and Benefits of Contract Farming for Farmers

Benefits	Costs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Provision of inputs and production ▪ Access to credit ▪ Guaranteed and fixed pricing ▪ Income stability ▪ Access to reliable and/ or new market ▪ Possibility to make use of by products and residues ▪ Introduction of appropriate technology ▪ Skill transfer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ An unbalanced partnership ▪ Agricultural transition ▪ Risk to indebtedness ▪ Social and cultural issues ▪ Farmer's empowerment and independence

Table-3. The Costs and Benefits of Contract Farming for Companies

Benefits	Costs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Production reliability and shared risk ▪ Quality consistency ▪ Reduced input and labor costs ▪ Flexible production capacity ▪ Promotion of farm inputs ▪ Political acceptability ▪ Access to agricultural credit, financial incentives and subsidies ▪ Overcoming land constraints ▪ Better inputs (for high value, labor intensive, agricultural enterprises) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Supply risk may remain linked to insufficient or inconsistent quality and quantity of product or default by contract growers. ▪ Difficult to enforce when farmers become tempted to sell produce on to the open market if market prices rise above contract prices. ▪ The limited literacy and education of some small farmers may also increase risks for the company.

The general perspective about contract farming in Cambodia, including amongst non-government organizations (NGOs), is that participating farmers are happy with the contract farming system.² The farmers receive high-quality rice seeds, learn new techniques from the company, and gain a higher price for their crops compared to the domestic market price. However, farmers are concerned about the safety of the pesticides that they are sometimes required to use in the contract farming, despite that the company teaches them how to use them. Yet, this assessment is based loosely on circumstantial evidence, and more systematic study is required before reaching such conclusions.

Farmers' attitudes toward contract farming in Cambodia

The existing literature on contract farming identifies several major areas where contract farming can provide benefit for farmers, but the choice to participate or not in a contract arrangement is in principle the farmer's decision. Farmers' expectation from contract farming is essentially a satisfactory regular cash income and, in some cases, the availability of inputs (notably credit facilities and fertilizers) which are normally unavailable or that are more expensively obtained through other sources. Based on these expectations, farmers voluntarily participate in contract farming.

In addition, a satisfaction from both farmers and firms over contract farming, in particular profitability, is certainly a key factor in the continued participation in contract farming (Sribooncitta and Wiboonpongse, 2008). According to Vermeulen and Cotula (2010), the higher prices and a more stable income provided by contract farming - that is linked to access to export markets and to the guaranteed purchase prices - have proved to be attractive to many farmers who join contract farming arrangements.

Based on farmer survey in Thailand by Sribooncitta, *et al.*, (1996), farmers joined contract farming for a number of reasons, namely: Market certainty for their produce; Price stability; Provision of input on credit; After observing their neighbors gaining a higher income; Opportunities to gain knowledge and technical skills; Others reason, including a lack of alternatives and expectation of higher price.

From the interview with contract farmers in Cambodia, farmers joined contract farming for a number of reasons, namely:

1. Good rice seed provided by the company (14 respondents)
2. Secure income (13 respondents)
3. High price (12 respondents)
4. Market certainty for their produce (8 respondents)
5. Extension services (7 respondents)
6. Provision of input on credit (5 respondents)

From the data above, the main reasons why farmers participate in contract farming as the company offers

² Pers. comm., NGO Forum on Cambodia, 2010

a higher price, good rice seeds provided by the company, and secure income.

Based on their research on contract farming scheme in Africa, Porter and Phillips-Howards (1997) found that what small farmer want from contract schemes is essentially a satisfactory regular cash income and, in some cases, the availability of inputs normally unavailable or more expensively obtained through other sources (notably credit facilities and fertilizer). This is similar to the AKR contract farmers, who join the contract farming due to the high price offered by the company that increases their income, and to receive the company's rice seed, which is better than the farmer's rice seed.³

While from the interview with no-contract farmers, we can identify several reasons why they are not participating in contract farming, namely:

1. High requirements by the company (15 respondents)
2. Heavy penalties by the company (7 respondents)
3. Too little land (12 respondents)
4. Lack of information (7 respondents)

From the interviews with non-contract farmers, it was found that about 15 respondents said that they did not participate in the AKR contract farming because of the high requirements of the company. The noted that the contract farmers are required to repay the same amount of rice seed as the company gave them, and in addition sell 1.5 tons of contracted rice to the company.

For small scale farmers, who own less than 1 hectare of land or whose soil quality is not good resulting in low rice yields, this specification is impossible. One villager said that:⁴

"I want to join with the company because it is easy to get good rice seeds, easy to sell rice and I will get a good price, but the requirements are very difficult. I worry about my rice field, because it does not produce a lot of rice this year due to less rain."

³ Interview with contract farmer 8, Kres Thom village, July 12, 2010

⁴ Interview with non-contract farmers 2, Kres Thom village, July 13, 2010

The Impact of Contract Farming on Farmers' Livelihood

Most of the AKR contract farmers have experienced increasing income since participating in contract farming because they get a higher price and good rice yield. In 2010 AKR contract schemes, the company promises a price of 30 Riel/ kg higher than the price in the market.⁵ At the time of the fieldwork, the market price for organic rice was around 1,250 Riel/ kg, therefore the company offers a price of between 1,260 and 1,280 Riel/ kg. Besides the better price, the company also guarantees price stability for the contract farmers; even if the price in the market goes down, the company's price remains stable. During that time, contract farmers can keep their excess contracted rice in the company's warehouse in order to wait the price increases or stable. However, higher rice price and increasing income was not enough to live on alone and farmers had to rely on other farm and non-farm activities.

Regarding the price-setting system, the contract farmers do not have much information about how the company sets the final price and in the end have to accept the price stated by the company. Farmers have little influence over the price setting since they transport the rice to the company's mill before agreeing the price, and it is impractical to take the paddy back to the village. Furthermore, whilst contract farmers did see increasing income, they were not satisfied with the contract arrangement, particularly the requirements and penalties of the company.

Besides increasing income, contract farmers also get good rice seed and extension services from company, such as training, access to credit, and warehouse facilities for farmers who want to keep their surplus rice with the company. The contract farmers can take either 30 kg, 60 kg, or 90 kg depending on their farm size. Most of the villagers are interest to contract with the company because they want to receive the good rice seed so that they get a better rice yield and a higher price.

Beside rice seed, AKR also provides the contract farmers with credit up to a maximum of US\$125 without interest rate. The credits are given on the security of the land or the anticipated value of the

⁵ Rice price in the market in Cambodia is free market mechanism, depend on supply and demand.

crop. The AKR credit scheme uses rice saved in the company's warehouse as collateral. Under contract farming arrangements in general, extension services from the company is important to farmers, especially when extension service from the government are inadequate to support farmers in rural areas.

Moreover, all respondents stated that contract farming provided secure market access for their crops. Under the AKR contract scheme, farmers must sell their contracted rice to company. Farmers must not sell their production to other traders except as may be authorized by the commune association. If there is evidence that the farmers have broken the contract and sold their rice to other traders the company will exclude them from membership to the commune association and bars their membership in the future.

However, the farmers felt that the company does not provide enough information to them about the pricing mechanism and profit sharing in the contract scheme. The contract farmers also have little bargain power to negotiate in price setting and have to accept the sale price agreed from the company. They often experience weight deduction that the company justifies due to their quality standard requirements, making many of the farmers dissatisfied as the company does not provide enough explanation about these quality standards tests. Moreover, a lot of risk is carried by the farmers as the company does not provide compensation if there is a crop failure.

At present, the farmers do not have a farmer organization, and AKR will not allow the farmers to form a farmer organization. Instead, the company has established a Commune Association under their management. Although this has farmers representatives included, the farmers' voices are not heard. Instead, the company tends to use the Commune Association to enforce their contract scheme and to monitor the contract farmers' operation to make sure that they will not default on the contract. Since farmers do not have farmers association, they are left with no choice but to work individually, making it difficult to negotiate with the company. Were a farmers' cooperative to be established, it would serve as a valuable intermediary for the farmers to negotiate and bargain with the company as a collective force.

CONCLUSION: LESSON LEARNED

The criteria for success of contract farming in increasing farmers' welfare can be derived from giving consideration to how the contracts themselves work. Some conditions that can measure the success of contract farming are that both parties believe that they are better off through contract farming and that they are satisfied with the contract arrangement. Key factors for successful contract farming to increase farmers' livelihood and bring benefits to the companies and farmers, include:

The contract

The terms and conditions of the contract should specify in detail the rights and obligations between companies and farmers, including the penalties for breach of contract by both parties. The contract arrangement should provide enough information about the pricing mechanism, profit sharing, and quality standards requirements. Moreover, the contract should be written transparently and simply to avoid misunderstandings of rights and obligations among contract farmers and companies.

The requirements of the contract should balance risk sharing and minimize uncertainty. When there are requirements from company that are difficult for the farmer, it is understood by the farmer that the company does not want to bear a fair share of the contract risk. However, high requirements will reduce the interest of contract farmers to join the company, affecting the company in the long run. In addition, new contract farmers will not join the company if the company sets difficult requirements.

The penalty should be appropriate to the contract farmers' economic and social conditions. Too heavy penalties will encourage the farmer to take risks or violate the contract in order to accomplish the requirements and avoid the penalties, such as using chemical inputs or cutting down forests to expand rice field. Moreover, heavy penalties reduce the farmers' motivation to enter into long-term relationships with the company or to participate in contract farming.

Enforcement of the contract, by monitoring the compliance or breach of the contracts should involve both the company and the farmers together, for ex-

ample through farmer organizations or commune councils that have contract farmer representatives. According to Eaton (2001), farming contracts, whether written or oral, should comply with the minimal legal requirements that apply in a particular country. It is important to take into account prevailing practices and societal attitudes towards contract obligations, because in almost all societies these factors can produce an outcome that differs from the formal letter of law. Moral hazard costs could be reduced through social pressures, incentive structures, or group contracts/ incentives. For instance, encouraging group or co-operative action among farmers can lower enforcement costs and ensure better compliance for the company. Punishing the village head for contract default, as happens at present, is not fair because the villagers feel bad when their village head is punished, despite the fact that they have tried their best to meet the contracts requirements.

Monitoring should be done by the company's staff in the field regularly in order to gather information directly from the contract farmers, including the problems that they face, to then inform whether the penalties are fair given the circumstances that year. Monitoring and evaluation from company is important to increase farmers' trust and feel that the company cares for them. As a result, the relationship between the farmer and the company becomes not only a relationship between growers and buyers under the contract scheme, but also a relationship that ensures the shared success of the contract farming for mutual benefit.

Role of the Government

The role of the government is to provide an "enabling environment" by creating a legal system and legislation in support of farmers and companies to engage in contract farming. The government can provide credit support, tax benefits and other policy incentives. Moreover, the government can play a central role in determining the distribution of cost and benefits between farmer and company and ensuring that the rights of both parties are protected.

Empowerment

Small-scale farmers need to develop their negotiating skills to gain higher prices for their com-

modities. These skills could be improved through trainings from Non Government Organizations (NGOs) or the formation of farmers' associations. There is need to improve the flow of market information and market trends. Farmer association will ensure that the members are not exploited, are informed about market trends, and have a stronger bargaining position.

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